

A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



George F. Meacham
1831-1917

Boston architect George F. Meacham designed three major buildings in Maine. The First Baptist Church and the City Hall in Lewiston were in the High Victorian Gothic style, while the Hartley Lord House in Kennebunk is a free interpretation of French Renaissance motifs. Born in Watertown, Massachusetts in 1831, Meacham received a B.A. from Harvard University in 1853. Upon graduation he worked for two years as a civil engineer with the Jersey City Waterworks. After training with an unidentified architect from 1855-1857, Meacham formed a partnership with Shepherd S. Woodcock of Somerville. In 1859, the young architect was hired to prepare the landscape design for the Boston Public Garden. The firm of Woodcock & Meacham lasted until about 1865, after which both men practiced on their own.¹

The First Baptist Church in Lewiston (1869-70) was erected on a prominent site facing the public square in the city center (Figure 1). The architect created a striking polychromatic effect through the use of brick walls set off by granite voussoirs over the windows and granite coping on the buttresses. In addition, the wood cornices were painted a sanded gray in imitation of stone, and the roofs were coursed with different shades of slate. Banded finials gave the building a somewhat exotic air. This bold multi-colored effect, combined with Gothic styling, provided Lewiston with an example of the High Victorian Gothic style which was rare in Maine.

By 1870 Lewiston had completed almost two decades of extremely rapid development. First laid out in 1851, it was incorporated as a city in 1863. Between 1850 and 1870, the population more than doubled. As the most important industrial center in Maine, it is not surprising that its first city hall would reflect grand urban pretensions. Although several local architects

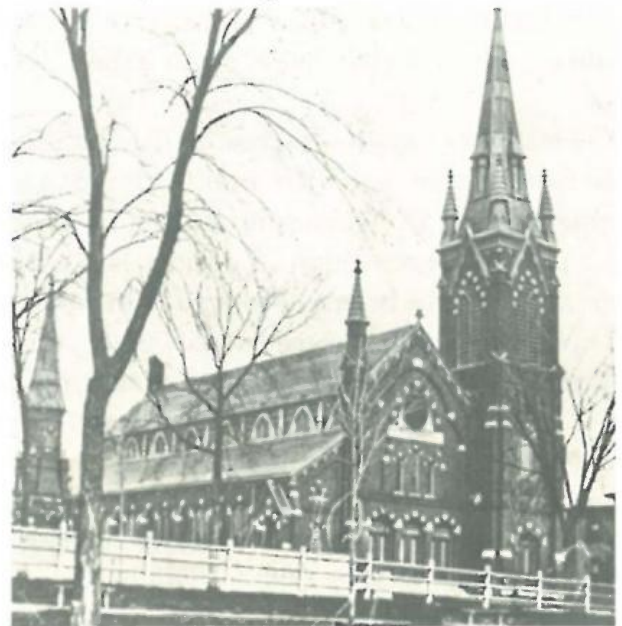


Figure 1. First Baptist Church, Lewiston, circa 1875 view.
(Collection, MHPC)

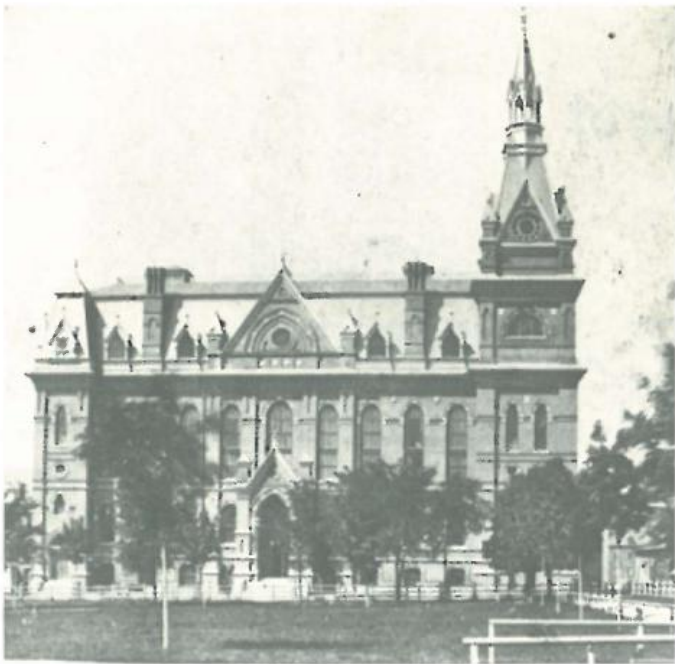


Figure 2. City Hall, Lewiston, circa 1875 view.
(Collection, MHPC)

were invited to submit proposals, the real competition was apparently between Meacham and John Stevens, another Boston architect.² After initially selecting Stevens, the building committee hired Meacham to prepare plans for a site facing the park and opposite the Baptist Church.³

For the City Hall Meacham again chose a High Victorian Gothic style (Figure 2). The building burned in 1890, and no photographs of details survive. Newspaper accounts, however, mention Gothic motifs such as "Tudor-Flowers", "foliated pinnacles" and "quatrefoils" in describing the exterior.⁴ Other Gothic features included lancet arched windows and doors, a tower with rose windows, and a belfry with ogee arched apertures.

The interior contained a great hall embellished with Gothic trim and rich multi-colored paint schemes (Figure 3). Measuring 165 feet by 80 feet and a full two stories high, the room had a roof supported on large beams decorated with "orange, turquoise and lilac scrollwork with russet shadings". Pendants at each intersection of the beams were painted "deep royal purple" with "bands of brown, drabs and gilt". The panels in the ceiling were "French grey", while the walls featured a light brown.⁵ Shallow balconies decorated with foliated Gothic woodwork provided additional seating without detracting from the sense of open space.



Figure 3. Meeting Hall, Lewiston City Hall, circa 1875 view.
(Collection, MHPC)

Meacham's last major commission in Maine is the summer house of Hartley Lord in Kennebunk, begun in 1884. By that time the architect resided in Newton, Mass., where Lord also lived. The Kennebunk estate, a working farm consisting of 85 acres, remains one of the most notable examples of late nineteenth century design in the state.⁶

With its French Chateau-inspired design, the house is a departure from typical Maine summer homes of the period (Figure 4). In contrast to the popular Shingle Style cottages, which are restrained in the use of ornament and strive to blend into the landscape, the Lord House presents a lively and exuberant exterior.⁷ The corner tower has a characteristic French conical roof, and the first floor features wide shiplap siding to suggest stone banding. The use of classical ornament is somewhat Baroque in character.

Although the outside suggests a mansion, the interior arrangement is more in keeping with its use as a summer home.⁸ The rooms are arranged in a compact, efficient manner (Figure 5). A large veranda, almost entirely open to the weather, surrounds all but the dining room and service wing, which are clustered together in the southeast corner. The axial plan of the house includes a long hallway extending from the front to the rear. A large round arch divides the front hall



Figure 4. Hartley Lord Residence, Kennebunk, circa 1886 view.
(Courtesy Robert B. Beardsley)

from the central hall, which is perpendicular to the grand staircase. The stairs extend into the hall and are enframed by a second round arch (Figure 6). Behind the staircase is the carriage entrance which also leads, via a vestibule, to the "office" and a lavatory. On the west side of the hallway are the parlor and the sitting room, which are connected by sliding doors.

All of the rooms in the main part of the house are finished in a variety of woods carved in Renaissance designs typical of the finer homes of the period. In the parlor, the least altered room, the ceiling is painted with a Renaissance arabesque design bordered by geometric panels. An

elaborate plaster cornice also includes a floral arabesque pattern embossed in the frieze.⁹

By 1885 Meacham had moved his practice to Newton, then a rapidly growing suburb. His last known work in Maine is an impressive tomb for Hartley Lord, designed in 1886. This Romanesque style granite structure still stands in the local Kennebunk cemetery. Meacham retired to Boston in 1891, where he died on December 4, 1917.

Roger G. Reed
June, 1984

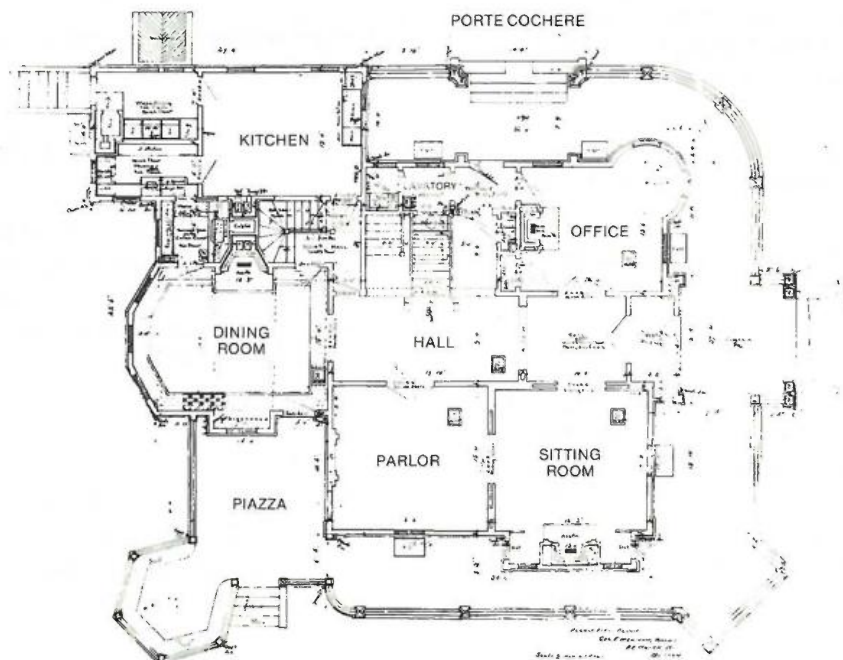


Figure 5. Lord Residence, First Floor Plan.
(Courtesy Robert L. Beardsley)



Figure 6. Lord Residence, Central Staircase, circa 1886 view.
(Courtesy Robert B. Beardsley)

- ¹ Background information on Meacham was obtained from Mrs. Arlene Lowney, who is preparing a detailed study of the architect. Mrs. Lowney also has a list of Meacham's known commissions in Boston and Newton. Meacham's familiarity with the latest architectural fashions is demonstrated by the fact that he owned a copy of Bruce J. Talbot's *Gothic Forms Applied to Furniture and Metal Work*, London, 1868, which is now in the collection of Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr.
- ² *Lewiston Evening Journal*, July 13, 1870. Stevens had designed the Pine Street Congregational Church opposite the park in 1867.
- ³ *Ibid.*, September 26, 1870; January 2, 1871; January 18, 1871.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, Dec. 6, 1872.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ *Biddeford Journal*, May 22, 1885. The architect prepared an elevation drawing for the carriage house that was styled very similarly to the main house. The building as constructed is a simpler design which was built in 1877 at another location and moved to the present site. The former supervisor's cottage, which is similar to the existing carriage barn, may also pre-date the main house.

- ⁷ It should be added, however, that the Lord House is located on a residential street containing other fine nineteenth-century houses and is not near the ocean.
- ⁸ During the late 1890s or early 1900s, local architect William E. Barry was hired to design small additions to the house which included a servants' living area and an expansion of the pantry. Barry, a nephew of Lord, may have also participated in the construction of the main house.
- ⁹ This house is one of the most well documented in Maine. In addition to architectural drawings (see below) and specifications, there are original wallpaper fragments and evidence of original interior and exterior paint schemes.

List of Known Commissions in Maine

First Baptist Church, Bates Street, Lewiston, 1869-70, Demolished, 1922.

City Hall, Pine & Park Streets, Lewiston, 1870-71, Burned, 1890.

Mill Building for the Little Androscoggin Water Power Co., New Auburn, 1871, Not executed.

Summer House for Hartley Lord, 26 Summer Street, Kennebunk, 1884-85, Extant.

Tomb for Hartley Lord, Hope Cemetery, Kennebunk, 1886-88, Extant.

Sources:

In addition to the sources already mentioned, the author wishes to thank Mr. Robert Beardsley, present owner of the Lord House, and Miss Lucinda Lord, the previous owner, for their generous help in documenting this estate.

Photo of George Meacham Courtesy of Harvard University Archives.

Architectural Drawings:

A complete set of floor plans, elevations and framing plans on linen exist for the Lord House. Extensive drawings of details on tracing paper also exist, but have not yet been inventoried. Drawings for the carriage house and the tomb are also extant, as are drawings of the additions prepared by William E. Barry.

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Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., Editor